

Inside the Third Reich's Aircraft Industry August 17



General Oshima meeting with Joachim Ribbentrop, Germany's foreign minister

The U.S. break into the Japanese machine-generated diplomatic cryptosystem in 1940 paid dividends throughout World War II. One of the prime sources of intelligence in this system (known to the Allies as “PURPLE”) was the Japanese ambassador to Nazi Germany, Oshima Hiroshi. Oshima was part of the diplomatic service but he also was a lieutenant general in the Japanese Army who reported on military affairs as well.

On August 17, 1943, General Oshima had a ninety-minute interview with Field Marshal Erhard Milch, the German Air Minister. Milch had been an important leader in the re-armament of Germany after World War I; he received his field marshal's baton in 1940 and was placed in charge of aircraft production.



confidential.”

The Oshima-Milch meeting came at a time when British and U.S. bombing was beginning to have a major effect on Germany. Among the important facts learned from Oshima's report on the session was that Germany was turning out 2,700 “first-class fighting planes” each month, and that the figure was expected to double within fifteen months. In fact, according to Milch, production had exceeded expectations over the previous few months, suggesting that the target figures might be reached sooner. Oshima noted that this information was “particularly

Milch admitted that statistics on U.S., UK, and USSR aircraft production were higher, but said that that this included many types of aircraft. He was confident that German production “would be able to cope with the situation.”

Under questioning by Oshima, Milch admitted that Allied bombing had been particularly destructive and the damage to German factories “was not lightly to be dismissed,” although he claimed that only about ten per cent of Germany’s production “potential” had been damaged. He said that factory reconstruction was going on satisfactorily. Part of the problem, he admitted, was the wide extent of territory to be defended. For this reason, Germany was giving production priorities to fighter aircraft rather than bombers.

In his report to his superiors in Tokyo, Oshima stated his opinion that the German air force was not “very inferior” to the Allies. In addition, with a major Soviet offensive under way, and the fact that Italy had surrendered to the Allies, Oshima concluded that “conditions are not likely to improve quickly, [so] we must recognize that for the time being, the conduct of the war by Germany will continue to be difficult.”

It is unclear what the reaction in Tokyo was to General Oshima’s report, but Japan made no moves to change its relationship with Germany. This insight into Germany’s ability to produce war materiel was highly valuable to Allied leaders, however.

SOURCE: Sir Harry Hinsley, et.al., *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, Vol III, part 1, appendix X. The general background on Field Marshall Milch comes from Wikipedia.

502 captions: photo 1 -- General Oshima in his Japanese Army uniform standing and talking with Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, who is in civvies; photo 2 -- a three-quarters shot of Field Marshal Milch in his Air Force uniform.